

Police investigate Conway's arrest at scene of accident

State senator says officers used excessive force

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Baltimore police launched an investigation yesterday into the arrest of a state senator who used the Senate floor in Annapolis to defend herself against accusations she blocked paramedics trying to help an injured child.

Joan Carter Conway, a Northeast Baltimore Democrat and potential mayoral candidate, said an officer used excessive force when he handcuffed her and forced her to sit on the curb.

The 47-year-old senator was in a crowd that had gathered after a 6-year-old girl was hit by a car at 7 p.m. Tuesday in the 2300 block of E. Monument St. in East Baltimore. The child, Sarah Gaskins, was treated at Johns Hopkins Hospital and was released yesterday.

"I made an inquiry," Conway said. "I was merely concerned about the child's welfare and whether the child's mother had been alerted. I was not hindering anything. I was not near the little girl. ... I'm not going to apologize."

Conway is being represented by



KARL MERTON FERRON: SUN STAFF

Defense: *Sen. Joan Carter Conway takes to the Senate floor to explain her actions.*

attorney Martin O'Malley, a City council member who is a frequent critic of city police. He issued a statement yesterday saying Conway was "kicked backward to the ground by the arresting officer."

Police Col. Robert F. Smith said the department will investigate the complaint. He said Conway was the only person in a crowd of onlookers who refused to step back and give paramedics space to work on the child.

"Everybody moved back but Ms. Conway," Smith said. "She was asked several times but she insisted she was not going to move back."

The arrest on the misdemeanor charge of hindering a police officer took on added significance yesterday when a chorus of politicians chimed in from the State House in Annapolis to City Hall in Baltimore.

Eighteen delegates and senators, including House Speaker Casper R. Taylor Jr., signed a letter urging Attorney General J. Joseph Curran Jr. to take over the investigation and "provide a neutral and objective" inquiry. "We can only presume that [Conway's] actions were benign and well intentioned," the letter says.

Curran's spokesman said he will take the request under advisement. Police spokesman Robert W. Weinhold Jr. said the department will continue its internal review, but has no objection to oversight.

Mayor Kurt L. Schmoke reserved judgment, but said he had spoken to Fire Chief Herman Williams Jr., who told him the crowd made treating the child difficult. "So they did ask people to move back and felt it was important to get the police to assist them," he said.

Sen. Nathaniel J. McFadden, an East Baltimore Democrat, questioned the police action. "The fact they would handcuff her and sit her on the ground is despicable," the leader of the city's Senate delegation said.

"This would not have happened in Guilford," said Sen. Clarence M. Mitchell IV, another Baltimore Democrat, referring to an exclusive neighborhood in North Baltimore. The area where the accident occurred is impoverished.

The officer who arrested Conway, Troy Dezwart, will remain on patrol during the investigation, Smith said.

Dezwart wrote in his report that Conway became "extremely agitated" when asked to move back and was arrested after she reportedly told him: "Arrest me, then." After she was handcuffed, Dezwart said she tried to pull away.

"The officer walked her over to a curb and asked her to sit down," Smith said. "She refused to sit down. The officer took her off balance and sat her on the curb."

Sun staff writer Ivan Penn contributed to this article.